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ABSTRACT

The reading workshop approach provided the method for creating a literate environment in an adult basic education classroom. The students were able to experience the principles of time, ownership, and response. Story maps were used to introduce the basic elements of a fictional story. Character webs were introduced to help students think of words to describe the characters they were reading about to develop vocabulary to be used in journal responses. Students at the beginning and intermediate levels completed story maps. At both the beginning and intermediate levels, students responded to their reading by writing in their journals using guiding questions. As a further development, the teacher met with students individually after they had completed reading to review any basic elements they still did not understand. A written personal response served as a model. The teacher read aloud to students every day. The most challenging part of beginning reading in an adult education classroom was stocking the shelves with high-intrest, low-level fiction, nonfiction, and picture books. The teacher held conferences throughout the year with each adult to help set goals for reading and to help evaluate progress. (Appendixes contain a sample story map, character web, intermediate reading fiction rubric, and advanced reading nonfiction rubric.) (YLB)

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CLOSING THE GAP: USING READING WORKSHOP WITH ADULT BASIC EDUCATION STUDENTS

Beverley Rannow

As John[1] , a student who had experienced Reading Workshop in my classroom last year, returned to school this September he paused at the door to my room. He then walked over to me and said with a gleam in his eye, "You know, I feel like I am at the doorway, on the edge and getting to enter a new dimension". He has confided to me more than once in the last couple of years that he has tried adult education classes in other places, but my class is the best class he has ever been in.

My class is not like other adult basic education classes. John's experience with adult education classes in the past has been "skills and drills". In my room he participates in Reading and Writing Workshop, although in this article I will be focusing only on Reading Workshop.

Dissatisfied with the "skills and drills" approach to teaching reading, about five years ago I began looking for a better way. I happened upon Nancie Atwell's book *In the Middle*. I became really excited and wanted to try this approach with my adult students. There was, however, a hurdle to cross. My students were not adolescent, middle school students with the experience of elementary school behind them. I would still need to teach some skills.

My students were literacy level adults. Many had never attended school before or had little formal schooling. Some were the failures of the K-12 system. They were white, black, Hispanic, and Asian. For some, English was not their first language, although they were all able to speak English adequately. Reading was difficult and avoided as much as possible. Some could read very few words at all. However,a common thread ran through the group, they had never experienced a literate environment. They were not members of the "literacy club" (Frank Smith, 1992).

It was clear the reading workshop approach could provide the method for creating a literate environment in my classroom. My students would be able to experience the important principles of time, ownership and response (Giacobbe 1986, 146-47). However, as I jumped in with both feet, it became obvious that I would have to modify reading workshop for it to work with my students.

My students had trouble picking up the basic elements of a fictional story such as:

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[1]The names of all students in the article have been changed.

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characters, setting, plot, the order of events, and the conclusion. They lacked strategies for reading non-fiction. Writing a "higher level thinking" response in a journal was very difficult. They needed to understand, have experience and practice with some basic elements in constructing meaning,to move them towards feeling comfortable expressing their personal responses to what they chose to read. They also needed to believe they could write a personal response.

I introduced the basic elements of a fictional story using story maps and demonstrated how to fill them out. I had students, at the beginning and intermediate levels, complete story maps for the fictional books they chose to read (figure 1- intermediate level sample). I introduced "character webs" to help them think of words to describe the characters they were reading about, which would develop vocabulary to be used in their journal responses (figures 2- beginning level sample).

I started students first at the beginning level. When they had mastered the beginning level story map and "characer web" I moved them to the intermediate level. At both levels the students responded in their journals, expressing their personal responses to what they chose to read using guiding questions. The questions at the beginning level asked the student to write about why they liked the book and who their favorite character was.The intermediate level questions increased the aspects of the story the students were to respond to. The goal of these two levels was to guide the student to the advanced level where they would no longer fill out story maps or character webs, but would write only their personal response to the book they chose. I developed rubrics as road maps to guide them along the way (figure 3- intermediate level sample).

I introduced the use of KWL sheets, that Donna S. Ogle developed, as a strategy for reading non-fiction. This strategy has students first write down what they know about the topic, then write questions for things they want to find out, and then write down what they learned. I demonstrated their use and had students who were working at the beginning and intermediate levels complete them. At the intermediate level I also introduced "characteristic webs", similar to the "character webs" (Figure 2), to help them think of words to describe the person, place, event, or subject they chose to read about, which would develop vocabulary to be used in their journal responses.

Again, I started students first at the beginning level. When they had mastered the beginning level I moved them to the intermediate level. At both the beginning and intermediate levels the students responded to their reading in their journals using guiding questions. At the beginning level the students were asked to discuss what they like about the book and why this person, place or thing was important. The intermediate level questions increased the aspects of the story the students were to respond to. The beginning and intermediate levels guided the students to the advanced level of writing response where they wrote only their personal response to the book they chose and did not have to do the KWL or "characteristic web" sheets. I developed rubrics as road maps to guide them along the way here also (figure 4- advanced level sample).

As a further development, I now conference with each student after they have completed reading at the beginning and intermediate levels to review any basic elements they still don't understand. I write back to them a personal response to their book in their journal to serve as a model. I move them away from mapping and webbing as soon as they understand the basic elements. A teacher aide and volunteer tutors read to and help non-readers and very poor readers in my room. The pride and self-esteem students feel when they have completed a book for the first time is tremendous. It is very rewarding when students begin confidently conversing about their books in their journals.

The following are some examples:

Juanita (*Women's Work, Men's Work*)
I liked the book because it was like real life. Problems like this happen every day. My favorite character is Carmen because she is very strong. She never gave up.

John (*Thurgood Marshall)*
I really enjoy the book and story about the man I wish I could have been. The book had more pictures than information about Mr. Thurgood Marshall the man who had so much going for him. The person was to be admired for his accomplishments. Thurgood was a man of much pride and was willing to work very hard to do his work right, but the prejudice of some people made the job very hard and very difficult... The author could have written more detail about his life...Thurgood Marshall being in the Supreme Court he made all kinds of difference in all our lives especially his people.

Phone (*Life in the Sea*)
I like the book ...because it is a kind of book good for knowledge...But I didn't like the way the author wrote everything in general not going far into detail. Therefore the book didn't have many interesting things for me to read.

Thanh (*The Nightmare*)
I like it because it was interesting to read. Even though I didn't really see Bailey I felt scared of him...

Ricardo (*The Race*)
I liked this story because many people come to the U.S. to look for a better job and change of life but the problem is that in the U.S. speak other language it is very difficult to find a job. The first, people need to go to school.

Maria (*Number the Stars*)
I like the way the author wrote this book because I understood better than some others. For me the author made the story real. I recommend this book because the story is like real life.

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After demonstration lessons are complete I begin mini-lessons. My first set of mini-lessons are "tips for helping yourself read well" encouraging them to read for meaning, read a little faster, read with their eyes not with their mouths, use context to figure out new words, abandon a book you don't like and to visualize.

I plan to do book and author talks this year also. Book talks are where I , the teacher, tell the students about a book I have read that I believe they would enjoy. I also share my journal response which serves as a model for the students own journal responses. Author talks are where I share information about an author who writes books I believe my students would enjoy.

I also read aloud to my students every day covering a complete story over a period of weeks. I have found that adults really enjoy historical fiction and non-fiction. Reading a book that has been made into a movie is particularly effective; such as *Sarah Plain and Tall.*

The most challenging part of beginning reading workshop in my classroom, an adult education classroom, was stocking the shelves with high interest, low level fiction, non-fiction, and picture books. There is a vast selection of such books for adolescents and a vast selection of picture books for children. There is a very limited number of high interest, low level books and picture books for adults. I bought as much as our program could afford of currently published fiction for literacy level adults and supplemented with Newberry and Caldecott award winning books I believed would interest my adults. Non-fiction books, the favorite of adult readers, were the most difficult to find at low reading levels. There are, however, many printed for children that are appropriate for adults that develop the basic knowledge that my students lack. I have written and received grants for funds to continue stocking my shelves[2].

From the beginning, I have conferenced throughout the year with each adult to help them set goals for their reading and to help them to evaluate there own progress. I begin by asking them what things they do to help themselves read well and what stops them from reading well. Then, I help them write two goals for their reading. I meet with each student three more times during the year to help them evaluate their progress and update their goals. My final question to them at the end of each year has been: In what ways has your reading improved this year? The following are some typical responses:

Ramiro
I can read and understand better, and I can read more difficult books.

Don
It is easier for me to figure out new words and their meanings. I am feeling more comfortable reading.

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[2]I have received grants from American Association of University Women (AAUW) and the Holland Community Foundation.

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Jane
I am struggling less with words. I got interested in reading more books and checked out library books.

Maria
I understand more of what I read, and I don't have to look up as many words. The last book I read I enjoyed because it was very challenging (she read the *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*).

As I look at John and my other students' experiences with reading workshop I know they are no longer "on the edge" and have entered that "new dimension", the literacy club spoken of by Frank Smith. They are reading books and are becoming a part of the literate world around them. The gap is closing and they are beginning to see themselves as readers.

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Figure 1

Name _____

Date _____

Story Map

Title _____

Author _____

Setting (where, when) _____
_____
_____
_____

Characters (who) _____
_____
_____
_____

Problem or Plot (what) _____
_____
_____
_____

Events in order:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

Resolution (conclusion) _____
_____
_____
_____

Figure 2

Name _____

Date _____

CHARACTER WEB- BEGINNING FICTION

Describe your favorite character in the story. What is he/she like? What does the character look like? How does he or she feel?

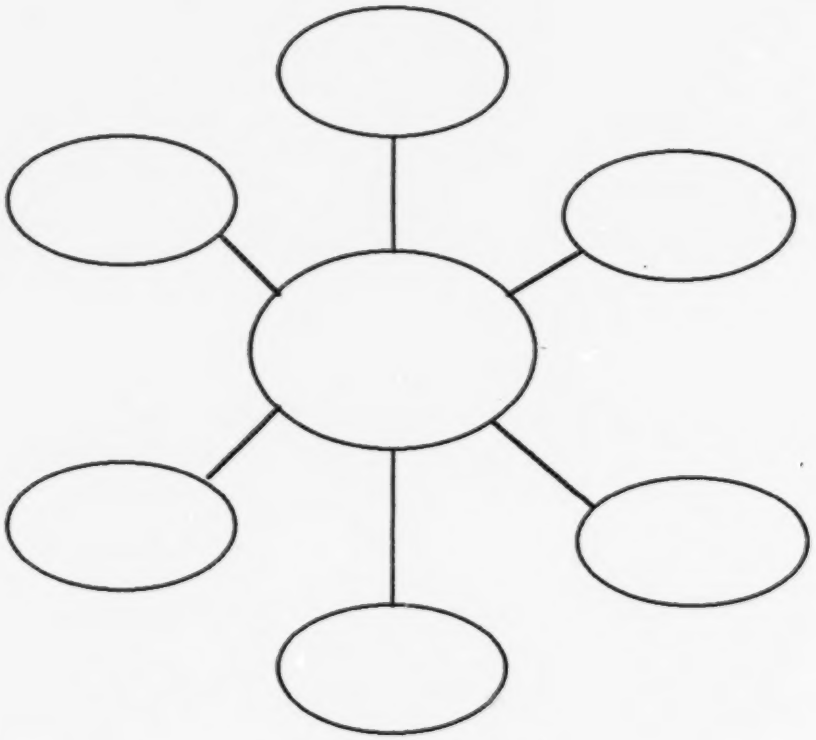

Figure 3

Student _____

Teacher _____

INTERMEDIATE READING FICTION RUBRIC

	Student		Teacher	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
Fill in the reading list chart.				
Write the title on the reading wheel.				
READ				
FILL IN STORY MAP				
Title				
Author				
Tell the setting.				
Name the characters.				
Name the problem/plot.				
Tell the main events in order.				
Tell the conclusion.				
CHARACTER WEB				
What is the character like? What does the character look like? How does he or she feel?				
JOURNAL ENTRY				
Write using the letter format.				
What did you like about the book? Why?				
What didn't you like about the book? Why?				
Who was your favorite character? Why?				
How did the problem or problems in the story affect the characters?				
What did you like or not like about the way the author wrote the book? Why?				

Figure 4

Student _____

Teacher _____

ADVANCED READING NONFICTION RUBRIC

	Student	
	Yes	No
Fill in the reading list chart.		
Write the title on the reading wheel.		
Write using the letter format.		
Tell the name of the book and underline the title.		
Discuss the following in your journal:		
Why did you choose this book?		
Which part of the book did you like the best and why?		
What did you think of the famous person, subject, or event?		
What difference has the famous person, subject, or event made on life today?		
Did you like the way the author wrote the book? Why?		
Did you like this story? Would you recommend it to others? Why or why not?		